FOUNDATIONS OF SATYAGRAHA

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ABSTRACT

The Gandhian technique of Satyagraha could be characterised by the term 'syncretic'. Although the impact of the west upon Indian traditions has elicited a response that is truly Indian, the end product bears non-mistakeable traces of the thought and experience of modern Europe. Efforts to revitalize Hinduism by creating a Hindu Raj and recover the glories of an idealized Hindu past were (and continue to be made by social and political groups and orthodox Hindu political parties. The importance of differentiating the Gandhian technique on the one hand, from the purely traditional on the other, cannot be over emphasised. As already mentioned, Gandhi used the traditional to promote the novel, reinterpreting tradition in such a way that revolutionary ideas, clothed in familiar expression, were readily adopted and employed towards revolutionary ends. In this research paper, it will be highlighted that how the two streams of thought merge and how Gandhi's leadership and creativeness transform elements from both developed the Satyagraha technique and can be understood better by analysing aspects of Hindu tradition in his background – the philosophical concept of Satya, the popular and ethical meaning of the Jain, Buddhist and Hindu ideal of Ahimsa, and concept of tapas (self-suffering) in Indian ethics will also be covered.

INTRODUCTION:

Gandhi has repeatedly acknowledged the influence of Western thinkers like Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau the New Testament. In each case the influence was only of the nature of corroboration of an already accepted ethical precept, and a crystallization of basic predispositions. On the nature of his early influences Gandhi said." "After much thinking I have arrived at a definition of Swadeshi that, perhaps, best illustrates my meaning. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. This is the use of my immediate religious as surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proven defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting.

In order to understand the success Gandhi achieved in mobilising the Indian masses we must analyses the following concepts basic to Hindu social and religious thought and their exploitation in the Gandhian appeal -

(i) Truth (Satya),

(ii) Non-Violence (Ahimsa),

(iii) Self suffering (Tapas) and

(iv) Brahmacharya (Self Control).

These form the metaphysical foundations of Satyagraha. Secondly, we will explore the pragmatic foundations and finally the ethical foundations of Gandhi's 'philosophy of action'

The teachings of 'Unto This Last' I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as a barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realised. The third had never occurred to me. Unto This Last made it clear as daylight for me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice". From Ruskin, Gandhi drew his inspiration on education, and both held that education was the discipline of the inherent instinct of man. Both emphasised that education must begin with the child, and stressed home and home ties as the temple of training for a better social life that would encompass all aspects of human intercourse. Both being of the view that spirit was superior to matter, they tried to spiritualise the political, economic and social spheres of human life. Gandhi incorporated into his own system the philosophical anarchism of Tolstoy. Romain Rolland describes this influence as 'The resemblance between the two men is greatest, or perhaps Tolstoy's influence has been strongest, in their condemnation of European and Occidental civilization'.

Nevertheless, Gandhi was not a thorough going Tolstoyan, insofar as he would not mind, quite unlike Tolstoy, making compromises over non-essentials. Gandhi was not so literal in the application of nonviolence as Tolstoy. He lays greater emphasis on the motive than on the evidence of killing itself. His ideal of Ahimsa ought to be understood in the light of the Gita's ideal of *nishkama* karma, i.e. in some circumstances, as shall be illustrated later, killing may be congruent with Ahimsa according to Gandhi. The American anarchist Thoreau, and also the New England Transcendentalist, Emerson both had a profound influence on Gandhi. After reading Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" he said "Thoreau invented and practised the idea of civil disobedience, in concord, Massachusetts, by refusing to pay his poll tax as a protest against the United States Government. Ho Went to jail too. There is no doubt that Thoreau's idea greatly influenced my movement in India". Socrates, as a seeker after truth exercised an incalculable influence on Gandhi, who considered him to be a Satyagrahi because he would not refrain from preaching what he knew to be 'Truth' to the Athenian youth, and bravely suffered the punishment of death. Gandhi hero worshipped Socrates for his indominable courage in preferring to drink hemlock rather than forsake the pursuit of truth, and resist Common superstitions through nonviolent reconciliatory means.

It is commonly observed that practically all normative and political theories are explicitly or covertly grounded in some metaphysical presupposition or the other. Aldous Huxley expressed this "Men live in accordance with their philosophy of life, their conception of the world. This is even of the most thoughtless. It is impossible to live without a metaphysic. The choice that is given to us is not between some kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic; it is always between a good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic. Gandhi since he was deeply interested in developing a philosophy of life, must have had some metaphysical presuppositions. Even if we do not regard Gandhi as a philosopher in the sense that he did not take interest in theoretical abstractions about the universe or analyse moral language, but he is certainly a philosopher is the Platonic sense of the term - "A philosopher is one who is always in love with knowledge of the unchanging: and he will desire all that is knowledge, and hate all that is false.

A metaphysician is one who picks out a category or aspect of reality, and tries to see the entire world in the light of the selected concept. Plato, Spinoza and Hegel were metaphysicians in this sense. While Plato sought to understand the world as an evolution of the Idea of the Good, Spinoza treated substance as the basic category and tried to look at the world through it. Ultimately, he concluded that to understand the world is to understand substance. Hegel regards the universe as meaningful only insofar as it stands in relation to the Absolute Idea. In similar vein, Gandhi places supreme emphasis on Truth, nonviolence and morality, analysing the entire world in the light of these concepts. He differs from other metaphysicians like Hegel only in being anthropocentric, moving

from man to world, not vice versa. But like all metaphysicians, Gandhi presents mankind with a vision. Metaphysics is often considered sterile insofar as metaphysicians usually present a picture of reality without providing any systematic apparatus to overhaul the world. It was Marx who first propounded the belief that abstractions were futile, theory must be married to practice, as inseparably at the two sides of a disc. Gandhi too believed that thought led to action, and directed his entire life and efforts towards social change. He established the interrelationship between pure thought and pure action, both in theory and practise. He is in this sense in his own words a "practical idealist".

Gandhi's views on the nature of man, society and means of liberation, develop out of his religio-metaphysical background. It is from this background that he deduces moral truths, which are subsequently applied to the facts of social life. He is in this sense a practical idealist', attempting to bridge the gap between norms and practice, i.e, observing situations, developing ideas and plans of actions, and applying them to the issue at hand.

Those moral and spiritual values which form his guiding principles, are according to Gandhi manifested in religion. Religion then is pivotal to his thought, the key to his philosophical thinking. But he does not use religion in a constricted credal fashion, Hinduism (especially) is not some official creed. One may be an atheist, and yet call himself a Hindu, if and only if he is relentless in the pursuit of truth (Satya). Satya (truth) is the cornerstone of Hinduism, indeed of religion in general. He looked at problems from the religious or normative point of view, believing that all issues of national, international, individual, social, moral, economic and political importance could be solved in and through religion, (understood in the sense that he used he term.) There are passages in Gandhi's writings which tend to show both his negative as well as positive attitude towards religion. The negative aspect followed the Upanishad style of definition by negation Neti Neti' (not this, not this). From his definition, he excluded all that which does not constitute religion. "By religion I do not mean formal religion or customary religion". "Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion. Swami Vivekananda too held the same view about religion: "Temples and churches, books and forms are simply the kinder -garden of religion, to make the spiritual child strong enough to take higher steps... Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation: it is being and becoming, and it is realization"

Thus, Gandhi's religiosity, his bold affirmation of faith in God, in the moral nature of the universe leads to a way of life which is in complete harmony with the needs of the times. Religion so long as it is not understood as a matter of dogma, creed or holy book, emphasizes the fundamental unity of the human race. That is why Gandhi said 'God is Truth'. But this statement could not really form the basis for philosophical edifice since an atheist could easily deny the existence of God... If the subject in the proposition is a meaningless term, the entire proposition is meaningless. One thing that nobody will deny is that 'sat' or 'Being' pervades the cosmos. Hence, he modified his statement to "Truth is God" i.e., "God is' (the sum total of life). Advancing a mystical explanation for Satyagraha, Gandhi contends that if everything is "Satyam *ekamevādvityan*" "Being, one without a second' who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed? In enslaving another race one is really enslaving oneself for from the ultimate point of view there is no such thing as otherness. If this be the truth (Satya), we must adamantly propagate the message of universal harmony. not socio-cultural dysfunctionality.

Very little can be said by way of comment on Gandhi's as restatement of Upanishad monism. It is all a matter of faith and beyond the pale of discursive reason. But this esoteric background is not without its purpose, and serves the religious foundation for Ahimsa, the only weapon of satyagrahi.

In the tradition of Advaita, he refers to soul, God and Absolute Truth as beyond our empirical grasp and conceptualization; nonanal in character. Nevertheless, we do try to grasp it in our categories of understanding and relativize it. Advaitins thus talk of two aspects of Truth (Sat) - absolute and relative or empirical. noumenal and phenomenal. Phenomenal 'truth' is at best limited, contingent and relative. This makes Gandhi some sort of a pluralist or anekantavadi (at the empirical level), wherein he emphasizes that reality can be conceived of in many different ways, all of which are equally correct, but do not present the entire picture. This spirit of tolerance is the bedrock of Ahimsa, which means nonviolence in thought word and deed. If truth can be relative, nobody has a

right to impose his or her way of thinking upon another; no nation has any right to subjugate or colonize other countries. The truth is that each race and culture has its own relative worth which ought to be acknowledged; Gandhi was keen to ensure that no one race walked race. roughshod over the aspirations of people of another Again, if everything is one nondual reality and multiplicity merely phenomenal, there is nobody else to attack. Violence is only possible between two individuals, where there is absolutely no question of duality, violence has no place.

Ahimsa, the cornerstone of Indian philosophy, ethics and spiritual life has a negative and a positive meaning, i.e. not to kill' and 'to save' or 'to love', respectively. The negative meaning of Ahimsa has two aspects, a subtle and a gross one, the former consists in not injuring indirectly i.e. abstaining from lust, anger, and greed. The latter consists in not injuring directly - not killing etc. Although at first thought subtle negative himaa may not appear to be violent, however the consequences of these destructive feelings and behaviour lead to violence, hence it is indirect violence (see chart "Typology of Ahimsa"). Almost all scholars have understood Ahimsa as comprising its negative and literal meaning only. Albert Schweitzer claims ahimsa is imperfect and incomplete, because it does not command man in the name of compassion, but in the name of metaphysical theories; it (Ahinsa) demands only abstention from evil and not the activity which is inspired by the notion of good. If this were really the case, then we could be Ahimsic by simply being indifferent to the world, which is far from the truth. Gandhian treatment of Ahimsa not only abstains from evil but makes a concerted effort to change evil by doing good. Before analysing Gandhi's treatment of Ahimisa and its place in his programme of Satyagraha, it would be useful to study the concept in Indian religio-philosophical tradition. The concept of Ahimsa first appeared probably as a reaction to the wanton and widespread slaughter of animals in Vedic sacrifices, subsequently becoming vital force in the systems of Buddhism and Jainism. The doctrine of Ahimsa first finds mention in a passage of the *Chandogya* Upanisad (3.17) where five ethical qualities - meditation, charity right dealings non injury to life and truthfulness are said to be equivalent to a part of the sacrifice of which the whole life of man is made an epitome. In his Autobiography, Gandhi claims that in 1903, studied Patanjali's YOGASUTRAS which placed *Ahinsa* in the *panchayamas* (restraints that purify the mind of evil passions, clearing the ground for yoga) Ahimsa (tenderness, benovelence, goodwill), Satya (veracity), Asteya, (abstention from theft). *Brahaacharya* (continence), *Aparigraha* (renunciation). Although Ahimsa is presented in a negative fashion as absentation from himsa, it also implies positive goodwill and amity towards all creatures; to be cultivated without any exception to particular creations and without restrictions to particular occasions/methods "*Sarvathā Sarvadā sarvabhutanām anabhidroha*".

Ahimsa in Jainism and Buddhism was understood more as an ethical term than as a social term. The non violence of Ashoka did not lead him to the logically necessary step of renouncing the fruits of conquests based on armed warfare, nor did he disband his armies and abolish death penalty, although he prohibited animal sacrifices. So far as Jainism is concerned, scrupulous enforcement of the rule of Ahimsa led to a sort of religio-ethical faddism, wherein lest any life be harmed or destroyed, some Jains swept the ground as they went along, or wore veils for fear of inhaling a living organism. Ahimsa was the fundamental basis of all Jainism. The way to salvation according to *Jainas* is through the Triratna jnana (knowledge of reality as it is). Sraddha (faith in the technique of the Jinas) and *Caritra* (cessation from doing all that is evil). *caritra* consists of Ahimsa (not taking any life, even by mistake), *sūnrta*, (speaking in such a way as is true, good and pleasing). *Asteya* (not taking anything which has not been given). Brahmacharya (abandoning lust for all kinds of objects, in mind, speech and body). Gandhi although he was influenced to no small extent by his socio-cultural and religious traditions, was no blind conservatist; while ancient scriptures enjoined Satya and Ahimsa for an individual's own perfection, Gandhi gave these individual virtues a social dimension through highlighting their positive aspects as necessarily implying positive social service. Gandhi made Ahimsa the tool of his Satyagraha for two reasons religious and pragmatic considerations. I shall examine both these considerations in some detail. For Gandhi, the positive and negative meanings of Ahimsa bear significance only in so far as they set limits to the concept. The least that Ahimsa calls for is non injury and the most that it enjoins is converting one's adversary through compassion. This treatment of Ahimsa makes it a universal ethic.

Thus Gandhi while discussing the negative form of *Ahinsa* contends, "This means that not only must I refrain from doing a person bodily harm, but I must also refrain from bearing him any ill will which might cause him mental suffering. It also means that I must do no injury in any form to the sub human species". In Gandhi's definition, the positive meaning of ahimsa is more elaborate that mere *daya'* (compassion) of Buddhism and Jainism. In addition to viewing Ahimsa as love, he views it as (i) sacrifice, which follows from love, and (ii) Ahimsa as an active force. If one loves and is willing to sacrifice anything for attaining the object of love, then one cannot afford to be indolent or indifferent. One must stand and face adversities bravely and resolutely. Ahimsa is not synonymous with passive resistance, but active, vigorous and an aggressive stance against all injustices. Gandhi's conception of the positive meaning of Ahimsa bears close resemblance to the New Testament's treatment of Charity' as mentioned in I Corinthians 13., where the term stands for suffering long, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, and loving those who hate one, (not only those who love one) just as Jesus did. "He who when being killed bears no anger against his murderer and even asks God to forgive him is truly nonviolent. History relates this of Jesus Christ. With his dying breath on the cross, he is reported to have said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"'.

Gandhi develops his theory of Ahimsa through analysing the close relation that exists between ends and means. The relation can be of two kinds (a) where the means are subsumed under end i.e. end justifies the means. (b) The end is subsumed under means, i.e., means justifies the end. The first equation of end justifying means was subscribed to by utilitarian who held the view that pleasure alone was desirable and ought to be attained at any cost. Marx and his followers like Lenin too believed that the end justifies the means. In their zeal to achieve the goal of stateless society and dictatorship of the proletariat, they did not shrink back from applying all kinds of techniques, fair and foul. But Gandhi differed from them in so far he pointed out an as uncontrivable relationship between ends and means where the former grows out of the latter. The means are the causal conditions for the production of a desired end. The means may be likened to a see, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." Gandhi's thesis on the close and inviolable relation between means and ends appears to be based the Samkhya causal theory-Satkaryavada., "*Asadakaranad upadanagrahanat Sarvasambhavabhāvat. Shaktasya Shakyakaranat karaṇabhāvachcha satkaryam."* [SAMKHYA KARIKĀ, 9]

The specific question that the Samkhya school of thought addressed itself to was whether an effect originally exists in the material cause prior to its production 1.e. was it a mere appearance -the explicit manifestation of something hitherto fore implicit, or was it an entirely new creation? There has been a tremendous amount of philosophical wrangling upon this issue with the *Naiyayikas*, Buddhists, *carvakas*, *Vedāntins* and *Samkhya* taking different stands. Here without going into the views of the other schools or taking sides in age old debate, I will simply state only the Samkhya viewpoint on causality, to show how close Gandhi was to it. The Samkhya school while repudiating *asatkāryāvada* of Nyaya *Shunyavāda* or *pratityasamutpāda* of Buddhism, Brahma *vivartavāda* or *Satkāranavāda* of Advaita Vedanta, holds the view that the effect exists in the material cause even before it is produced. This view is expressed in the aforementioned Sloka which can be paraphrased as follows:

Asadakaranat' -If the effect did not preexist in its cause, horn and could it would become a mere non entity like a hare's never be produced; *Upadanagrahanat'* because, of its material cause because, the effect is only a manifestation *Sarvasambhavabhavat'* – A material cause can produce only that effect with which it is causally related. It cannot be related to something that does not exist. Therefore, before its production the effect must be implicit in its material cause; therefore, *Shaktasya Shakyakaranāt'* Production an actualisation of the potential, for only an efficient cause produces that for which it is potent i.e. curd is never produced from sand, therefore *Karanabhāvāt'* – The effect is in no way different from its material cause. The curd is really milk in a different form, just as cloth is a conjunction of threads, the curd therefore exists in the milk. Without discussing the application of this logic to the relation between purusha-prakriti and the evolution of the world, I will point out that just as Gandhi contends there is a inviolable casual relation between means too holds the same view. and ends, Sankhya too holds the same view. The end is always implicit in the means its material cause. If the

cause/means is evil or violent, it follows logically that the end will always be evil or violent. Realization of this simple truth is of utmost relevance to all of us today. The super powers are trying to maintain world peace through assuming threatening stance of stocking nuclear warheads. This will never lead to peace but someday blow the planet earth into oblivion. Corruption too can be tackled with this simple fact that the means must justify the end. Can any rational individual genuinely justify bribery for attaining narrow personal ends? corrupt means will never in honest dealings nor violent methods wrest freedom result from slavery and consequent bloodshed. Corruption breeds corruption, violence and hatred can only breed more fierce hatred, for that is all they have the potency for. Just as a healthy tree does not emerge from a defective seed planted in impoverished soil, no good end can emerge form means that are inherently evil or violent. The logic behind adopting Ahimsa as a tool for liberation then lay in the fact, that if good ends emerge out of good means alone and nothing else, peace after liberation can never be achieved on a foundation of violence and anarchy. Nonviolent techniques are imperative to maintain peace and amity. Gandhi sought to strengthen his contention through citing historical evidence to the effect that those who live by the sword, usually also perish by the sword. Ancient civilizations like the Greeks and Roman famous for being the abode of warrior races, were wiped off the face of earth, only to remain enigmas in history textbooks, while Indian civilization based on the principles of universal brotherhood and tolerance (*Sarvadharna Samabhava*) has not perished despite frequent assaults down the centuries. Almost all contemporary movements for restoration of liberty, that were fueled and guided by violent uprising have failed to provide any stable government, with one junta constantly trying to oust another.

Gandhi highlighted the relation between means and ends through employing a very interesting simile. "Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight you for it; If I want to buy your watch. I shall have to pay you for it; and according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property or a donation. There are three different results from three different means. Jumping from the realm of ethics to Indian metaphysics and religion, Gandhiji's treatment of Ahimsa is definitely influenced by Jaina doctrine of relativity or *anekāntavāda*. This theory contends that Absolute Reality is a meaningless abstraction, there can be no such thing as absolute. Reality as we can know it, grasp it, is only relative. We are not capable of knowing the Absolute Truth, only particular aspects of it. The Jainas explain this through the allegory of some blind men, each of whom felt one particular part of an elephant -trunk, ear, legs, tail, tusks and each concluded that the entire elephant corresponded to his limited conception. Wittgenstein too developed the strain of thought in his Philosophical Investigations. When he criticised essentialism established in Tractates, he held "But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed? What are the simple constituent parts of a chair? - The bits of wood of which it is made? or the molecules, or the atoms? - "Simple" means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense 'composite'? It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the 'simple parts of the chair'. Again: Does my visual image of this tree, of this chair, consist of parts? And what are its simple component parts? Multi-colourless is one kind of complexity; another is, for example, that of a broken outline composed of straight bits. And a curve can be said to be composed of an ascending and a descending segment.-----"34 Section 47, Philosophical Investigations [Ludwig Wittgenstein].

Although Wittgenstein was talking in the context of linguistics and the problem of meaning i.e., what words denote, his strain of thought can very easily be extended to other realms-especially that of human behaviour and social interaction. If meaning is relative, there is nothing absolutely this or categorically that, we have no right to take a dogmatic stand and force others to follow suit. Diversity is for real, not an illusion so far as the empirical world is concerned. Ahinsa once again flows from the concept of relativity of thought or reference/denotation. While the Jainas derived the epistemological doctrine of *syādvāda* from the principle of *Anekāntavāda*, Gandhi gave it a moralistic twist and developed the view that since man's knowledge is condemned by nature to be relative, we can never be aware of all the aspects of any given situation; hence we have no right to pass judgements on others, nor have we the authority to punish anyone. This is really the same as Jesus's challenge to the masses which enjoins only those people to cast the first stone, who have never sinned themselves. Since we are fallible and possess but a limited perspective, Ahimsa flows necessarily from *anekāntavāda*. Coupled with the Kantian

Categorical Imperative, "Act on that maxim which you can will to be a universal law of nature," it follows that nobody can will wanton violence to be the foundational principle of society.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, we can say that Millions of men women and children following the Mahatma's advice, struck work, left school, Court, offices, and took out processions picketing shops, and burning foreign cloth. But they had to be provided alternative means of sustaining themselves, lest poverty tempt them back into the clutches of the slave driver. This brings us to the positive aspect of Gandhi's Ahimsa and Satyagraha. As part of his nonviolent Satyagraha movement Gandhi in reply to British capital and industry enjoined Indian entrepreneurs to come forth and act as trustees for society, donating their wealth for developing an alternative industrial infrastructure to provide employment. In order to clothe themselves he urged Indians to develop self-reliance through spinning coarse cloth. New educational institutions functioning and imparting education along nationalistic lines were set up. Devices like prohibition were propagated only to control wasteful expenditure as also ensure that nobody could be bought off with a bottle of liquor. Having provided Indians with alternative sources of income, clothing and education and imbued them with the spirit of self-reliance and fearlessness, Gandhi was certain that they would be in a better position to oppose the might of the British Empire. The only factor that required looking into was the fragmentation of society. So long as Indians looked upon themselves as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and untouchables they could never achieve any goal. That is why Gandhi made it a point to emphasise unity, and upliftment of untouchables, making the erstwhile social outcasts an integral part of society. Through espousing the cause of Khilafat in Turkey he won the hearts of the Muslims, and for a short while succeed in knitting India into a composite whole. Having consolidated his forces, he launched a frontal attack on the British not through wielding weapons, but simply through refusing to cooperate, or obey laws that were morally repugnant. Being already enslaved, the Indians had nothing more to lost but their shackles. Seeing that holding onto India no longer served its economic interests, Britain was compelled to leave after granting independence in 1947. That India was torn asunder into two nations amidst bloodshed and the eventual assassination of Gandhi, only goes to show that Indians were not intellectually convinced about the efficacy of Animsa. They treated Ahimsa as an expedient to the goal of swara), nothing else. The partition riots by no means imply the failure of Gandhi, because probably many more millions would have died but for his intervention; besides, subsequent civil rights movements in Africa and America having adopted exactly the same means have met with a considerable measure of success.

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